

A Casserole that's 4 Recipes in One



Chef Rich Mead

PHOTO BY JOHN GILHOOLEY

onions make a nice garnish or topping for cheese toast. The butternut squash cubes are great in salads and the cauliflower béchamel can be used as a sauce for macaroni and cheese or as the base for vegetable soup garnished with croutons.

You can change the components of the casserole as the seasons change, subbing in roasted carrots for the butternut squash, zucchini noodles for the spaghetti squash and any seasonal greens for the Swiss chard. You could also use sautéed broccoli or roasted Brussels sprouts, and sprinkle cooked sausage or bacon on top.

"A lot of what I do when I teach classes or create a recipe is try to inspire people to experiment," Mead says. "There's no limit to what you can try. When you're cooking for people, it shows that you care for them, so usually everybody's happy."

Gentle reader, please don't let the lengthy list of ingredients for this recipe scare you away. This sneaky casserole, from chef Rich Mead of Farmhouse at Rogers Gardens in Corona del Mar, is like a Russian nesting doll. It actually contains four mini recipes, all of which can be made ahead - and even used to create other dishes.

All of Mead's cooking is inspired by the relationships he develops and the food he finds at local farmers markets. He hangs out at the Santa Monica Farmers Market on Wednesdays and the one in Hollywood on Sundays, and he has some great tips for farmers-market shoppers.

First, you could go with a plan, but that isn't entirely necessary. Mead says you can always throw all the veggies into a soup. "It's going to taste good if you use chicken stock," he laughs.

To find the best stuff, walk around, talk with the farmers and taste what's on display. "You'll see things that are cut up

and ready to taste," says Mead, "and that's part of the whole fun of going to these markets is getting involved with the food." The relationships you'll build will pay off, and the farmers won't sell you anything but the best. Most also like to offer advice. "It's important to ask questions and learn," Mead advises.

As you shop, keep in mind how many people you actually need to feed so that you don't overbuy. "Even though you see a bunch of fun stuff, realize that next week there's going to be a bunch of fun stuff there, too," says Mead.

This recipe, which is on the Farmhouse dinner menu, is one way to capitalize on farmers-market bounty. Each component is best made ahead so that you can taste and adjust seasonings. The combined casserole can even be refrigerated for a day or so before the final baking.

Or you could roast the spaghetti squash, sauce it with your favorite marinara, and serve it like spaghetti. The caramelized

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Spaghetti Squash Gratin with Cauliflower Béchamel From Farmhouse

(Serves 6-8 as a main dish)

INGREDIENTS

2 small spaghetti squash, enough to yield about 4 cups cooked
2 cups butternut squash, cut into 1-inch cubes
6 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 large onion
4 cups cauliflower florets
2 cups leeks, cleaned and sliced into rings
2 cloves garlic, plus 1½ teaspoons minced
6 cups vegetable stock or water

2 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 cups Swiss chard, chopped into 1-inch pieces
1 pinch red pepper flakes
½ cup toasted bread crumbs
½ cup grated fontina cheese
¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
Salt and fresh ground pepper
¼ cup chopped Italian parsley for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Make-ahead components:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Split the spaghetti squash in half, scrape out the seeds, wrap each half with foil and place on a sheet pan. Toss the butternut squash

cubes in 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt and pepper to taste. Spread on parchment paper on a separate sheet pan. Place both pans in the oven. Roast the butternut squash until it is soft and beginning



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